

THEIR HISTORY AND CULTURE

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have been fairly constant factors in Chinese, as in much other history, help to give bulk to the annals of the time. Rebellions there were, too, sometimes within the older sections of the Empire and sometimes in the newly conquered domains. Part of the South that had been annexed under Wu Ti, especially the island of Hainan, was abandoned, on the ground that it cost more to hold than it was worth. To the west the Chinese continued to extend their power. Their influence seems to have been potent even on the northwestern border of India. The Hsiung Nu were defeated again and again, and their chiefs finally acknowledged Chinese suzerainty. Hsiung Nu, too, entered the military sphere* of China. The hereditary principle of succession, however, brought with it weak and dissipated princes, and, early in the first century A.D., a crisis arose by which the dynasty was, for a time, displaced.

WANG MANG

The new threat to the Han came through a family named Wang. One of the Wang daughters became a concubine of the heir apparent who ascended the throne in B.C. 48. Having the good fortune both to win the favor of her lord and to present him with a son, she was made Empress and her son heir apparent. Upon the death of her spouse, her son became Emperor and she Empress Dowager. Her brothers and others of her kin were given high office and she and her family dominated the state.

Of the male relatives of the Empress Dowager, the most discreet was a nephew, Wang Mang. In contrast with the other influential members of his family, he was distinguished for his

scholarship, his patronage of learning, his filial piety, and his temperate living. While the others were dissipated and extravagant, he lived with marked frugality and distributed nearly all his great income among his poor friends and followers. It is not strange, therefore, that while still in his thirties he became the most powerful figure in the Empire.

The Empress Dowager's son was on the throne for about a quarter of a century, long enough for the Wang family to establish itself firmly. He, however, left no heir, and the nephew who succeeded him (B.C. 6) brought with him his own mother's relatives and the Wang family was temporarily eclipsed. The new